



No Look Pass (United States, 2011)

Author: Guest Contributor

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The documentary *No Look Pass* ends with a snippet of epilogue that no longer holds true. But rather than an inaccuracy about which one might be embarrassed, the recently made false statement is a testament to all that has been achieved politically since director Melissa Johnson completed final cut. And this being San Francisco, I anticipate cheers when that inaccurate text appears on the screen followed by exclamations of 'Not Any More!'

No Look Pass follows Emily Tay, a Burmese-American Harvard women's basketball star player who dreams of playing professionally in Europe upon graduation rather than getting an MA or MRS as is the preference of her father and mother respectively. Her father's professional plans for Tay are disrupted by the opportunities now available for women in global professional sports and her mother's expectations are disrupted by the fact that Emily Tay is gay.

The first half of the film follows Tay through her senior year parked in Harvard Yard as her team competes for the Ivy League championship. The second half of the film follows Tay's first year in the German women's professional basketball league. Each identity that makes up Tay's multi-variant larger self (woman, Burmese, American, immigrant, gay, daughter, sister, girlfriend, etc) is given significant camera time. As a result, *No Look Pass* includes some awkward moments of identity formation. Tay talks about being the only Asian face of an otherwise White team and how she has reconciled this by often wishing she were White. Symptomatic of wider societal issues that many members of minority groups have to confront, such is part of the process of struggling towards comfort with ones identities. (At one moment in the film, Tay's best friend advocates for a spot on the butch/femme spectrum simply called 'comfortable'). In this way, *No Look Pass* shows identity as a process of becoming rather than something fixed in time.

Thankfully, concerning her Queer identity, Tay's team is very supportive. Tay is lucky she wasn't coached by someone like former Penn State University women's basketball coach Rene Portland who, on recruiting visits, would advocate for her school over others by telling recruits' parents that "lesbian activity" was not tolerated on her team. As chronicled in Dee Mosbacher and Fawn Yacker's documentary *Training Rules* (2009), what Portland really meant is she wouldn't allow lesbians or anyone suspected of being a lesbian on her team at all. In Tay's Queer-friendly college environment, her concerns about coming out are solely focused around whether her parents will mistakenly consider such honesty disloyal to them. (Her older brother, on the other hand, is an ally and confidant for this aspect of Tay's life and there's a really sweet moment in the film when she confesses how dear he is to her.)

But the film isn't just about identity politics. Tay's got skills and she's a joy to watch on the court. Plus, her coach at Harvard is a great example of the perfect mix of providing support when needed and a huge ass-whooping when a player isn't performing up to their potential. I am definitely glad we are kept out of the locker room in one scene because Tay's coach's yelling is frightening enough, thank you. I didn't need to see the face of that fury. Yet when Tay gets to Germany, she plays for a coach she has trouble respecting, so she must shift to motivating herself and her teammates on her own.

It's clear how things could be very different and less actualized for Tay if she didn't have basketball. As a result, *No Look Pass* becomes one of the best arguments for the benefits of Title IX., the federal act that pushed public schools to provide girls and young women equal access to scholastic sports. Just as Tay learned how to cross-over like Allen Iverson, she's figuring out how to bring the A-game of each of her multiple identities, how to be loyal to all areas of her life important to her through the opportunities made available through basketball.

Tay doesn't make all the baskets that come her way in life. But she's got the guts to take shots. And when she does make baskets, literally and metaphorically, *No Look Pass* brings a smile as wide as a three-point perimeter.

No Look Pass will be screening at three San Francisco Bay Area Festivals:

The 14th San Francisco IndieFest on Saturday, February 11, 2012 at 5pm and Sunday February 12, 2012 at 12:30pm at the Roxie Theatre

San Jose's 22nd Cinequest on Thursday, March 1, 2012 at 7pm, Sunday, March 4, 2012 at 11:15am and Thursday March 8, 2012 at 11am at the Camera 12 in downtown San Jose.

The San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival on Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 6:30pm at the Sundance Kabuki and Wednesday, March 14, 2012 at 9:00pm at the SF Film Society Cinema at New People.

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*Since 2000, Adam Hartzell has been a contributing writer for the premier English-language website on South Korean cinema, koreanfilm.org. He has written extensively on Hong Sang-soo for websites, festival programs, and *The Cinema of Japan and Korea* (Wallflower Press, 2004). He contributed several essays on various South Korean films for the upcoming *World Directory of Cinema: Korea* (Intellect, Ltd., 2012). He has even written on films not from South Korea for websites such as sf360.org and *Hell on Frisco Bay*.*